

Providing leadership in complementary medicine research: Introducing the Australian Research Centre in Complementary and Integrative Medicine (ARCCIM), Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney

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Introduction

An integral component of national and global health research systems is the development of the capacity to undertake health research effectively (Lansang and Dennis 2004). Such research capacity building is also essential for producing a sound evidence base that is relevant to, and of benefit for, practice and policy decision-making (Cooke 2005). This is as important for complementary medicine (CM), including herbal medicine, as for conventional medicine (Adams et al 2012a).

Unfortunately CM scholarship to date, both in Australia and internationally, has provided little focus or energy towards either ensuring direct impact from research into practice/policy or directly responding to the research capacity needs of the CM research field (Adams et al 2012b). However, some recent initiatives and developments do offer an excellent opportunity for CM research to address these challenges. The first such development has been the founding of the Australian Research Centre in Complementary and Integrative Medicine (ARCCIM) at the Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney.

As outlined in more detail below, ARCCIM offers a genuine break from previous research endeavours in CM. The Centre is committed to expanding the critical research gaze with regard to practice and practitioners of herbal medicine (amongst other CM) to include a diverse set of disciplinary approaches and methodologies often considered to constitute or lie within the broad areas of public health/health services research (epidemiology, biostatistics, health economics, etc). While the importance placed upon efficacy studies (via randomised controlled trials and other designs) remains imperative to the future of CM, there is nevertheless a recognition of late that research needs to also draw substantially upon accompanying methods and approaches in order to help

adequately address the public health and health service challenges facing the broader Australian health care system (Adams 2008).

ARCCIM: Critical methods, translational research

ARCCIM has been established at the Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney to consolidate over 15 years of collaborative CM research activity and expertise (e.g. see Adams and Tovey 2003; Adams et al 2009a; Steinsbekk et al 2007; Pirota et al 2010). The Centre will be officially launched later in 2013. The mission statement of ARCCIM is:

- To provide national and international leadership regarding critical public health and health services research that contributes to our understanding of the safety, efficacy and cost-effectiveness of CM use and practice;
- To subject CM practice and use to rigorous research methods and perspectives in order to provide a broad evidence base for patient care and health policy;
- To produce and disseminate research findings that inform best world practice and policy for stakeholders involved in community health, health service delivery and management
- To increase the depth and breadth of research capacity in relation to CM amongst both researchers and practitioners.

World-leading and premier national research centre: providing leadership in CM research

ARCCIM is a world-leading public health and health services research centre focused upon CM. It is the premier national research-intensive centre providing world-class expertise and leadership in CM research in Australia with a core focus upon providing insights of direct benefit to practice and policy.

Addressing unmet needs in complementary medicine research

ARCCIM is the only centre in Australia to bring together world-renowned, multidisciplinary researchers and methodologists with extensive experience in successfully partnering with practitioners and policy makers to develop a broad evidence base to inform care and decision-making regarding this significant and growing area of health care. This unique feature ensures that investigations are critical and rigorous while also maintaining sensitivity to practice realities.

Competitive external funding and internationally renowned expertise

ARCCIM is the only Australian centre to house senior academic staff awarded prestigious government fellowships (including Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development (PHCRED) and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) fellowships) focused upon the critical examination of complementary medicine use, practice and policy. The Centre has attracted the largest program of external competitive grant funding (>\$7M) from such sources as Australian Research Council (ARC), NHMRC and PHCRED, Department of Health and Ageing for research into CM in Australia to date.

Empirical research

Our broad and growing program of empirical research draws upon rigorous methods and perspectives from across such areas as clinical health research, health economics, epidemiology, psychology and social science. This provides a critical, evidence base on topics as diverse as CM use and practice in women's health (Frawley 2013; Hope-Allen et al 2004; Sibbritt et al 2006), rural health (Adams et al 2011; Wardle et al 2012), ageing care (Adams et al 2009b), primary health care (Adams and Tovey 2000; Adams 2003) and chronic illness care (Adams et al 2005; Broom and Adams 2009; Sibbritt and Adams 2010) amongst others.

Collaborative partnerships and bridging the researcher-practitioner divide

ARCCIM has long-standing collaborations and partnerships with a wide range of prestigious associations and organisations including the American Public Health Association, the Public Health Association of Australia, the Network of Researchers in the Public Health of CAM and the Indonesian Public Health Association amongst others (e.g. see Adams et al 2013). In addition, ARCCIM is also deeply committed to maintaining and advancing partnerships with the CAM practice community through activity and dialogue with representative organisations and associations across different modalities. As acknowledged in other health care fields, this is an important approach for health care provider groups in helping gain professional legitimacy and elevated status (Adams and Smith 2003) and is undeniably a

core requirement for CM modalities and associations in advancing the interests of their members.

ARCCIM research capacity building initiatives

At the core of the ARCCIM approach to CM research development is a commitment to facilitate and initiate research capacity building for both practitioners and researchers. ARCCIM offers workshops/seminars for early career and advanced researchers as well as practitioners in a range of topics including quantitative and qualitative methods, systematic and critical reviews and increasing research engagement for developing practice. As the leading research-intensive CM centre in Australia we also offer excellent postgraduate supervision (Masters and PhD) as well as post-doctoral opportunities and provide collaborative input and consultancy services for regional, national and international research projects. In addition to these capacity building approaches, ARCCIM has also initiated an International CM Research Leadership Program.

ARCCIM International CM Research Leadership Program

ARCCIM is proud to announce the ARCCIM Leadership Program providing essential mentoring and career development around CM research with the ultimate goal of identifying, nurturing and supporting future Australian and international CM research leaders.

The ARCCIM Leadership Program will be open to international early-career and mid-career CM researchers (PhD through to 10 years post-PhD). Successful applicants will demonstrate an emerging track record in CM-focused scholarship and research output and illustrate excellent potential for and commitment to developing the national and international field of CM research. Researchers and practitioner-researchers with an interest and track record in a broad range of perspectives, disciplines and methodologies covering public health, health services research, health social science and clinical health research are all encouraged to apply.

Successful applicants will be Fellows of the Program and will be invited to ARCCIM, Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney annually for a minimum of 3 years. Each annual visit will provide opportunity and resources for Fellows to work on career development, strategic planning, and enhancing and broadening their research skills and experience. Invited speakers with national and international profiles from research, publishing and industry will facilitate sessions at the annual meetings, and ongoing support and mentoring will be provided by ARCCIM senior academics. The Program is fully funded and each Fellow appointed will be fully supported with travel expenses and accommodation for annual visits to Sydney, Australia.

The first intake of Fellows on the Program will take

place in early 2014. **An official call for applications to join the Leadership Program will be made later in 2013.**

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